

Story #448 (Tape #2, 1972)

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Stargazer to the Sultan [The Grasshopper]

Once there was and once there was not a poor man who lived in Bursa. One day his wife went to the public bath. When she arrived at the bath, she found the place in a great state of confusion. The poor woman asked, "What is the meaning of all this confusion?"

"For the love of God, be silent. The wife of the chief stargazer is arriving."

Looking where they pointed, she saw a woman approaching. When she saw how splendid the woman looked, she grew very envious of her and said to herself, "I just wish that my husband could, just for once, be the chief stargazer!" Saying that she left the bath and went home.¹ When she reached home, she said to her husband, "Bey, tomorrow you must become a stargazer."

"Woman, how can I become a stargazer?" he asked.

"Tomorrow, early in the morning, go to the courtyard of the mosque, and announce to all who come there that you are a stargazer. Say that all may come to you and ask of you any information they wish."

"Woman, you bring trouble to my heart. What could I do in such a position? I am an ignorant man."

"Tell them that you look to the stars," she said.

¹ There is some truncating of the tale here. In almost all versions, the wife of the poor man is required to move from place to place in the bath to make room for women of higher social status, the highest of whom is the wife of the chief stargazer.

"Oh, God, oh, God," said the man, but what could he do? Upon the insistence of his wife, he went to the courtyard of the mosque. Finding a place to sit there, he started shouting, "Stargazer! Stargazer! a stargazer!"

After a while two ladies who had lost their earrings in the bath came along. "Look," said one of them, "there is a stargazer father. Let us go and ask his advice." The two women approached the man. "Stargazer father, we had just come from the bath where we lost our earrings. Can you find them?"²

"My daughter," he said, "Toward evening I shall gaze at the stars. If you will give me so many akche pieces³ and return in the morning, I shall look into the stars for you."

"All right," said the women, giving him the amount of money he requested.

When the poor man went home, he said to his wife, "Woman, you have created trouble for me, and there is no way out of it."

"What happened?" asked his wife.

"So-and-so happened. Two ladies came to me and said that they had lost their earrings at the bath. They want me to find them their earrings, and they gave me this money to do so. I accepted their money, but what kind of answer can I give them? I told them that tonight I would look

² From time immemorial, prophets, diviners, and magicians have been supposed to have among their abilities the power of locating lost or stolen objects. Long before rhabdomancy was associated with water witching, beginning in the late Middle Ages, it was thought of as a skill in looking for desired objects.

³ In the Ottoman coinage, an akche was a third of a para, which was, in turn, one fortieth of a kurush, which, in its turn, was 1/100th of a lira, the lira today (1974) being worth eight or nine American cents.

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into the stars. Then I came home. What answer can I give to those ladies tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow tell them that you see their earrings at the place where the water burbles from the bath."⁴

The next morning the ladies appeared and asked, "What results did you have, stargazer father?"

The women went to that place, and there they found their earrings. When they found them, they started telling everyone that the stargazer had done such-and-such a thing. After a while all these stories brought fame to the city.

One day the padishah of Istanbul put his ring somewhere, while he was taking his ritual ablutions [before prayers], and then forgot where he had put it. He called all his stargazers, but none of them was able to find the missing ring. Actually, one of the servants from inside the palace had taken the ring.

Well, what was to be done? When all the stargazers of the padishah were unable to find the ring, they told the padishah that there was a stargazer at Bursa who could find it for him. The padishah, when he heard this, ordered his men to go to Bursa and get that stargazer, being careful not to harm him. The padishah's men went quickly and brought the stargazer from Bursa. The padishah asked this man, "Is it true that you are a stargazer?"

"Yes, your majesty."

⁴ The word the narrator used here was çağıl.

Ahmet Uysal: "What is çağıl?"

Mustafa Ölmez: "The place where the water flows, like blood."

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"Well, my ring has been lost, and you must find it for me."

"Your majesty, I must consult the stars."

"Very well," said the padishah. "I shall give you twenty-four hours in which to find it."

The man returned to his wife and said, "Woman, have you heard what you have done now? Tomorrow the padishah will execute us."

"What did he say to you?" his wife asked.

"He said such-and-such."

"Well, did you ask him to allow you time enough to find the ring?"

"He gave me twenty-four hours' time. What can I do?"

"Go to him tomorrow and tell him that tonight you were unable to discover anything from the stars. Ask him to give you forty days, at the end of which you will find the ring."

"All right," said the man. And the next day he went to the padishah and won forty days' time from the padishah.⁵

The padishah appointed servants to take care of the stargazer. They were to bring food to the stargazer every day. They were known in those days as tablekeler⁶.

After some time, the stargazer said to his wife, "Woman, this is the kind of situation in which a slip means death."

The stargazer and his wife hung a pumpkin to the wall outside their house. Every day the stargazer threw a stone inside the pumpkin. When the servant came each day with the food, the stargazer would tap the

⁵ This is obviously bad narration. The padishah, having issued his mandate to solve the crime in 24 hours, would not have extended the time to 40 days without some convincing reason. In better tellings of the tale the time initially asked for is 40 days, partly because 40 is a traditional number.

⁶ Is the word related to tabla, circular tray?

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pumpkin, "Takır, takır." The servant wondered why the stargazer always did this, and so he listened at the door. After the thirty-eighth⁷ day, the stargazer, tapping the pumpkin, said to his wife, "Woman, we have twenty-four hours to live; after twenty-four hours, we shall be dead."⁸

The servant, who was listening at the door, also happened to be the person who had stolen the ring. He entered the room and said, "Stargazer father, you were talking about something as I came. What was it?"

"Do not ask about it. I was questioning the fairies closely, for they are to tell me tonight the name of the person who stole the ring. They are, in fact, going to bring him here."

"For the love of Allah, O stargazer father, do not report me. I made a great mistake, and now how can I escape from it?"

"My good fellow, why did you worry me so long? But the solution is easy. There are ducks at the palace, aren't there?"

"Yes," said the servant.

"Well, arise early tomorrow, and go to the place where the ducks are fed. Grab a duck, force its beak open, and force it to swallow the ring. After that, break one of its wings so that I may know which duck in the flock it is."

After the servant had followed these instructions, he reported to the stargazer that he had done as directed. "It is well, then," said the stargazer, and he proceeded to the presence of the padishah.

"Well, what did you discover, stargazer bey?" asked the padishah.

⁷ Thirty-eight days plus 24 hours do not quite make 40 days.

⁸ At this point the servant (who is also the culprit) usually misunderstands a remark of the stargazer: "That's 39," "One more to go," a cryptic remark which he applies, in his guilt, to himself. Had the servant here heard the stargazer's remark, he would have had no reason whatever to confess the crime. This is an instance of bad narration by an inept raconteur.

"My padishah, your ring has been seen to be in the stomach of a duck."

"Take it out!"

They brought the ducks to the palace and flew them from the high wall. Of course, the one with the broken wing was unable to fly. They killed this duck and found the ring in its stomach

"Here, please take it, my padishah, and may your life be long," said the stargazer.

"Come," said the padishah, "you must be my chief stargazer."

And thus the man became the chief stargazer to the padishah, and his wife had the position she wished. They lived there at the palace for a long time.